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The enjoyment of literature, as well as that of any other human endeavor, requires readiness. The literature teacher has two responsibilities--to discover the student's previous literary experiences, and to be thoroughly familiar with the problems involved in the development of literary appreciation in a second language. Assuming that the reader of a second language has acquired the basic skills of reading in his native language and that he can read in English with some fluency, it is extremely important that his attitude towards reading literature be positive. To achieve this, he must have been introduced to the literary world at a comfortable, uncomplicated level, where the theme was not too unfamiliar and the vocabulary load not an obstacle to comprehension and enjoyment. The reader must also develop skill in perceiving implied meanings, generalizing, grasping and relating important ideas, anticipating events and predicting outcomes, and recognizing sound patterns and rhythm which evoke sensory images. It is suggested that teachers avoid exhausting every line, crowding materials, lecturing instead of teaching, and spending too much time on historical or social background. Teachers should look out for misinterpretations due to cultural differences, and not assume skills or emotional maturity. Selection and presentation of various literary forms are discussed. (AMM)

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THE ENJOYMENT OF LITERATURE

Talk delivered to the TESOL Convention, Chicago, March 1969.

Elsa Gelpi

The enjoyment of literature, as well as that of any other human endeavour, requires readiness. As Margaret J. Early says in an article about the stages of growth in literary appreciation,[1] "If we are to help readers to find delight in literature, we must know something about the kinds of abilities, understandings and experiences that deepen enjoyment." From this statement it seems to me that the teacher has two responsibilities. First, he must discover how the student has responded to previous literary experiences and the range and quality of them. Second, he has to be thoroughly familiar with the problems involved in the development of literary appreciation in a second language.

So, let us consider this question. What should the reader of a second language bring to advance his enjoyment of literature? Assuming that he has acquired the basic skills of reading in his native language and that he can read in English with some fluency, it is extremely important that his attitude towards reading literature be positive. To achieve this, he must have been introduced to the literary world at a level where he was comfortable and at ease, at a level where he found pleasure without too much struggle, where hero and heroine met at the

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1 Margaret J. Early, "Stages of Growth in Literary Appreciation," English Journal, Vol XLIX (March 1964), 161-67.

end, where characters were not complicated, where the theme was not too far from his experience and where vocabulary load was not an obstacle to comprehension and therefore to enjoyment. Literature of this type may not be considered literature by many teachers, but if it produced pleasure and interest in reading, it made the approach to literary appreciation a pleasant task.

If the reader is convinced that the study of literature gives pleasure, the teaching of literature will be rewarding for both teacher and students, but if it is not so, we should ask ourselves what made the first experiences frustrating and unsatisfying. Undoubtedly several things. Poor choice of reading materials such as forcing classics on immature readers, scarcity of reading materials, poor planning by teachers such as emphasizing everything in a selection, too much dissection such as analyzing every word, too much time spent on irrelevant details, footnotes and references, too many obstacles such as a heavy vocabulary load, slang, or dialect. Summarizing, too many problems to cope with. Any reader feels defeated if he has to face this long caravan of poor practices.

Now, let's discuss the second responsibility. What is required from a reader who is to study a literary selection and derive some pleasure from it? What skills are needed for entering into the world of literature? Several skills are needed.

1. Skill to perceive implied meanings in words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and dialogue. This skill involves work with at least unusual meanings, connotation, ambiguity, metaphor, similes, personification, paradox, symbol, irony, sarcasm and mood. In dialogue, the reader will find idiomatic expressions.

2. Skill to make generalizations about the setting, characters, plot, conflicts, climax, point of view and theme.
3. Skill to establish relationships. The reader will have to learn to recognize relationships of cause and results, of similarity and contrast, of analogy, of sequence, relationship of parts to the whole such as that of title and story, form and content, content and tone, content and references, allusions, etc...
4. Skill to perceive ideas. He will have to grasp the important ideas, supporting details and will have to arrive at conclusions.
5. Skill to anticipate events and predict outcomes.
6. Skill to recognize sound patterns and rhythm and evoke sensory images. These are skills which are difficult to work with in a native language; therefore, they will be considerably more difficult to work with in a second language, but it is still possible to enjoy literature if the teacher follows some of these procedures:

    1. Avoid extremes such as exhausting every line, passage or piece you teach,or the opposite: crowding, pushing quantitites of reading material in order to cover as much ground as possible in a course.
    2. Resist the temptation to lecture when you should be reading or teaching how to read and comprehend.
    3. Do not spend so much time on the historical or social background so that there is little time to read.
    4. Look out for misleading interpretations caused by personal or cultural experiences of the reader.

5. Do not assume that students have the basic skills for reading, find out.

6. Do not assume that the reader has an emotional maturity that he does not have. Immaturity will cause the student to react with an apparent lack of sensitivity.

7. Know your materials thoroughly. Study them until you are sure that you understand the content, the structure, the obstacles to comprehension and the skills needed to read and enjoy. Decide what aspect of each selection you are going to emphasize and do it.

8. Plan your program so that it develops in units. Do not skip from story to poetry and vice versa. Each literary form has its particular problems and skipping often confuses the immature reader.

9. Begin with selections that are easy and related to their experience and build up from that level to more difficult and complicated selections.

10. Before you begin to work with literature, explore the reader's skills for each literary form, the attitudes toward each and the reader's previous experiences.

11. Be aware of the cultural background of the reader. A reality which the teacher of English as a second language has to face is that with each student he is dealing with two cultures. One of his responsibilities is to transmit the English literary heritage as well as its culture. So, the teacher has to deal not only with the language but with the understanding of the values of the American culture. In the case of readers from the Western world, many values

will be similar but in the case of Eastern cultures, many values will be diametrically opposite.

Thus, the teacher has a problem in choosing materials. If the reader's culture has values too different from the American values, many of those selections read in class will have no appeal, no meaning, or will be distasteful and perhaps shocking.

The teacher's problem is to choose selections which have the best American values and are at the same time acceptable to the reader's culture. This is no small problem if in the classroom there are representatives of a large number of nationalities.

12. When actually teaching, begin with the selection as a whole, proceed to study its parts or elements and then build it up again into a unified whole.

13. Use short selections whenever possible. A long span of interest in a second language is difficult to maintain unless the selection is extremely interesting.

14. Proceed from the concrete to the abstract, from the literal meaning to the interpretive. When discussing similies and metaphors, first ask what is compared with what and then what element is common to both. When discussing symbols, ask for the concrete object first, then ask what it represents, what it symbolizes.

15. Remove as many obstacles to comprehension as you can possibly do without depriving the reader of his moment of discovery, or understanding. Lighten the reader's load

by providing effective vocabulary help, by explaining references and allusions which are difficult to find. Remember that Anglo Saxon words are more difficult for Latin people than the long words of Greek and Latin origin.

16. Include grammatical structures as part of the vocabulary load. If the structures are useful for the student's active vocabulary, take them up in a grammar class, not in the literature class. Give a vocabulary lesson after the reading class and follow it with a short summary in which students use the vocabulary discussed previously.

17. Motivate the readers constantly. Only very mature readers have their own motivation.

18. Plan the assignment carefully and specifically so that it is useful to the student.

19. Be sure there is purpose for reading, one for the teacher, and one for the student. Reading without purpose is a waste of time and effort. Give a few guided questions to direct the reading. Steer the course as a captain steers his ship, carefully plotting every twist and turn to get to his destination.

20. Study the specific problems of each literary form so that you may anticipate their appearance and be ready for them. Now let's analyze each form briefly.

Each literary form presents a number of obstacles for its comprehension and a different type of enjoyment. The enjoyment of the essay largely depends on the reader's ability to understand the purpose of the essay and the means used by the author to accomplish it. To arrive at this

understanding, the reader has to see the structure of the essay, that is, to grasp the main ideas and supporting details, and to recognize the various types of paragraphs used to illustrate the ideas. He also has to recognize the relationship between the paragraphs and the way they are connected by transitional words. To these ideas he will add the interpretive meaning obtained from the analysis of the literary devices so that he has the total meaning. Then, it will be easier to formulate a central idea or theme and to evaluate how well the author has achieved his purpose, what artistic, social or ethical values the essay has and in what ways the essay has increased the reader's growth. To enjoy the essay, the reader must see the emergence of the central idea accompanied by illuminating details and should feel pleasure in discovering the author's plan. In this respect we can say that the reader has recreated the author's plan, which is what the author intended.

The short story and the novel are probably more interesting to read, but offer more problems. In the short story, because it is condensed, much information about the setting and the characters will be inferred from a few clues. The reader has to be guided to establish the setting in time and place and the main and minor characters. Characterization is revealed in many ways: by direct explanation, by the description of a character, by their clothing, by thoughts, by actions, by what others say to the character, by what the character answers and by people's reaction to the character. If the reader knows this, it will be easier for him to understand who the protagonist is, why he acts in a particular way. From the clues he is given, he will make generalizations and will come to some conclusions about the characters, the conflicts and the solution. Short stories which are mostly dialogue sometimes are difficult for second language students because characterization

and the action depend on speech and a great deal of information has to be inferred from spoken lines whose language is direct and full of implications. Short stories of this type are excellent preparation for plays.

The plot, with its elements of suspense, mystery, or dilemma and its conflicts, is probably the easiest part to follow. At a very early stage, the incidents should be organized in sequence if the reader is to see how the action is complicated by every incident and the place where the climax occurs. Flashbacks and internal monologue are devices that add to the meaning, but interrupt the flow of the action. They should be pointed out to the reader if he doesn't recognize them. Though unhappy endings are generally disliked by young people, the end has to be justified in terms of the characters and the conflicts. Symbolical stories demand maturity and awareness on the part of the reader. Sometimes symbols fit so well into the literal context of the story that they are not apparent except to the most perceptive reader, but the reader has to learn to deal with them if the story is to yield significant meaning.

After the story has unfolded and the main character made his decision, the reader puts back all the elements of the story into a whole to see how it is unified and why it is a work of art. It is at this point that he can ask himself what view of life it supports and what insight into life it reveals. By living with the characters and sharing their experiences the reader learns about life, love, death.

The novel, if it is not too lengthy, is generally a pleasant reading activity. The reader may need more help with vocabulary and will benefit from some sort of division into chapters or parts. Guide questions for such parts are an effective way to insure that the reader

doesn't get lost or discouraged. The length of the novel provides more ways to develop characters and more incidents to complicate the rising action. Climax may be more difficult to locate for some, and in many cases, there may be a theme and subthemes. The reader has to expect this, but it should not stop his enjoyment of identifying himself with a character and living another life.

Poetry is the earliest and most concentrated and intense form of communication, but it can, in Tolstoy's words,[2] "infect" in others the feelings the writer has lived with, the agonies and ectasies, the triumphs and frustrations and the glories and shames. Because poetry is condensed, it is difficult to read. Yet, once the reader realizes that the poet is a man speaking to him, trying to make his own experience live again for others, the reader no longer feels that enjoying poetry is an impossible task.

Since the poet's means of expression are sound patterns, imagery, word-texture and structure, the reader should start with poems which have a definite rhythm and catching rhyme, for these elements are enjoyed by readers of all ages. The pleasure of this type of poem is mostly that of sensation, but this type of poem begins to awaken the senses. From there on, the reader passes to images; the picture images and the poetic images which reinforce the mood. Then words begin to emerge and to link metaphors and similes together to give some sort of logical backbone or structure to the poem. Symbols are more elusive, for interpretation often depends on an emotional association which has nothing to do with logic. Symbols can link the

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[2] Leo Tolstoy, What is Art, Oxford University Press, London, 1930.

senses with emotional implications and produce in the reader a sense of clarity, but also a sense of mystery.

Words are the foundation of every poem; therefore, diction in poetry is vital. A single poet may use compression, expansion, omission or repetition. Some simple lines are powerful, others are flat, but in all poetry there is drama. To enjoy a poem, the reader must realize that the poet is addressing someone. He is a lover, thinker, or mourner, and he is in some mood. It is to the degree that the reader feels the poet's voice in the words of the poem that he appreciates and enjoys the poem.

Peotry is not only a pattern of sounds, but also a theme, a response to life. These two elements cannot be separated. The poet generally has a design. The design will vary with the theme, the mood, and the images, but it will have a meaning. Discovering its meaning will give the reader a new feeling, a feeling of sharing life's mystery and its wonders.

In poetry, as well as in drama, reading aloud is the best means to enjoyment. Reading once or twice doesn't detract from enjoyment because each reading may have a different purpose, but reading aloud in a second language often presents many problems. If the reader is not a good oral reader, he will probably enjoy listening to a good reader or to the teacher, rather than reading himself. Just as stories of the objective type are excellent preparation for play reading, one-act plays are good preparation for long plays, and dramatic poetry is also a good preparation for play reading.

Drama also has its own characteristics. Its most important characteristic is its limitation to dialogue. In drama there is little or no place for description. The work consists almost entirely of words

spoken directly. It is limited in the use of place and the number of characters. It can not show characterization from as many points of view as a novel does. Action in drama is closely related to the characters. The action moves forward with strain and conflict. In drama as in stories, the speakers prepare the reader for subsequent effects. For these reasons, the reader of drama has to learn to infer a great deal of meaning from the dialogue for the dialogue characterizes and moves the action forward. Each line in a drama develops the situation and directs the reader to the future. This is a technique which the reader has to understand. Another technique deals with the problems of the past which in drama is very specialized. The characters deal with the past at the same time that they talk about something else. The information is implied in lines which are looking ahead, not back. A problem which the reader faces is the use of idiomatic expressions, slang or colloquialismsthat are necessary to spoken English. These expressions may become obstacles to comprehension. The teacher has to anticipate the problems that may arise and provide some help to make the reading continuous and meaningful.

The conventions fo the theater are another aspect of play reading that the reader has to understand because these conventions provide a context for the action. To read intelligently and with enjoyment, the reader has to consider stage directions along with the literary conventions, for stage directions help the reader visualize the scene and action. Thus, play reading demands that the reader harmonize the two parts of this unique literary form.

Plays, poems, novels, short stories and essays deal with the manipulation of experience. They recreate an experience which the reader may never get in any other way. But this experience will be

be meaningless unless the reader tries to participate in it. Encouraging this participation is the great contribution of the teacher of literature. As Andre Maurois says: "The art of reading is in great part that of acquiring a better understanding of life from one's encounter with it in books."[3]

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[3] Andre Maurois, The Art of Living, Harper and Brothers.

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